Noblesse Oblige

VraieEsprit

Bleach

Complete

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Noblesse Oblige

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Summary

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Description

In honour of Shunsui's birthday - a oneshot about Shunsui and Juushirou after Shunsui received THAT notification from CC46. Warning: Contains spoilers for anyone not more or less up to date with the manga and the 1000 Year Blood War arc.

1. Noblesse Oblige

::~Disclaimer~::

So this actually got written some time back and I edited it to make it more accurate to the manga plot. It's possible Kubo is still planning to write something about this, or involving the two of them, but I felt the need to do it anyway since Ukitake's so invisible in the manga right now.

This is a big spoiler for the current manga arc so if you're not up to date, read at your own risk. I won't take responsibility for anyone who's spoiled as a result of reading this oneshot!

I am uploading it today because today is Shunsui's birthday, July 11th. In past years a Meifu story has begun on Juushirou or Shunsui's birthdays, but this time there is no Juu Shun fic to begin. However, I have this small offering instead. So I hope you all enjoy. It is set after the chapter in which Shunsui gets that message from Central 46 following the invasion of the Quincy)

Juu and Shun as ever, belong to Kubo Tite, though I'm still trying to lure them away with tea and cookies.

~Noblesse Oblige~

"Shunsui?"

Juushirou knocked lightly on the door of the Sou Taichou's office, pushing the divide back slightly to reveal the chamber within. It was as it ever had been, its normality piercing afresh through Juushirou's grief, but it was the room's sole inhabitant which immediately drew his attention. Shunsui had made no attempt to call him in, nor had he even signified that he had heard his friend speak. He stood beside Genryuusai's old desk, running his fingers over the worn grooves and seams of the wood in such a way that told Juushirou the man's mind was far from what he was doing. The Thirteenth Division Captain hesitated for a moment, for it was clear from Shunsui's body language that he neither wanted nor expected company, but then he steeled himself, pushing back the divide fully and stepping into the room.

As he did so, Shunsui's fingers paused above the wood.

"A Soutaichou can discipline a Taichou for entering his office unbidden, Ukitake."

The words were soft, unwelcoming and edged with a bitterness that Juushirou had not heard there for some years. He frowned, gathering his wits together, then made his way purposefully across the chamber to where his friend still stood.

“He can,” he agreed evenly, “and in that eventuality, I’ll await your punishment… but as I’ve already committed the transgression, I see no reason to turn back.”

There was a long pause, then a heavy, shuddering sigh from the pink-haori clad figure.

“I can’t talk to you about this,” Shunsui’s voice was still flat, still unwelcoming, but Juushirou could hear the pain suppressed in it, and his own heart, reminded again of their loss, began to ache too.

“Shunsui…”

“I’m not Shunsui. I can’t be that. I can’t hear you call me that…” Shunsui faltered, his hands halfway to his head as though moving to cover his ears, but Juushirou was too fast for him, and he crossed the remaining space between them in a split second, wrapping determined pale fingers around the other man’s wrists.

“Shunsui,” he repeated softly, and Shunsui pulled his hands away.

“You think I’m joking, but I’m not. I’m dead serious. I don’t want you here. I can’t… have you here. I need…”

“You’re not alone, you know.”

Juushirou’s gentle words cut through his friend’s protestations, and Shunsui flinched as if stung, the tension coursing through his frame once more.

“There is only one Captain Commander,” he said hollowly. “One man, on whose shoulders rests everything.”

“One man, supported by a team of people who are there to back him up,” Juushirou spoke simply. “I know you have your own thoughts and feelings on all of this, and I’m not here in defiance of your authority. I understand what it means and if its what you want, I’ll respect it in future — but please don’t try and take everything on alone.”

He turned to go, but before he could, a hand shot out, grabbing him by the shoulder and forcibly stopping him in his tracks.

“I don’t know what else I ought to do,” now the pain was very real in his friend’s voice, and Juushirou turned, this time seeing that

Shunsui had turned to face him. Lines creased his brow, shadows beneath eyes which were dry yet glittering as though fighting back tears. There was a desperation there — an emptiness Juushirou hated seeing, and he sighed, taking a deep breath.

"Sensei hasn't made a mistake, you know," he said quietly. "You can do this, and do it well."

"I know I can," Shunsui admitted, releasing his hold on Juushirou's shoulder and running his fingers agitatedly through his hair, dislodging the hairtie so that sections fell loose across his shoulders. "It's not a matter of ability, Juu. It's about will. It's about spirit. It's about… about wanting to do it and having to do it and… not knowing what else I can do when he's not here. It's like I'm waiting to hear him scold me for being in his office, entering his quarters… touching his property… but then there's only silence, and I remember that he'll never scold any of us again. No matter what I do… he'll never bring me to heel and put me in my place. When you believe someone is near invincible, and they've shaped your entire life in so many ways, something like that is hard… to comprehend."

His voice cracked slightly, and at the sound of the familiar nickname, Juushirou felt his own tension begin to seep out of him.

"But you aren't alone. Sensei knew that too," he said matter-of-factly. "He knew we would all be here to back you up in everything you do. Isn't that why we're here? To protect Soul Society? Isn't that why we all exist? That's what we have to do now — avenge Sensei and make sure this can't happen again."

"Don't throw my words back at me," Shunsui's brows twitched together in annoyance, and Juushirou offered him a faint smile.

"They were good words," he said with a shake of his head. "Harsh words, but words we needed to hear. They were strong words — a leader's words. Grief is for when we're alone. In uniform, we have other things to do. That's why you're here right now, and why we became shinigami in the first place. It's all what Sensei taught us… coming to fruition in a way of which he'd be proud."

"But he isn't here to see it," Shunsui clenched his fists, batting them together in his frustration, and Juushirou knew he was fighting his emotions, 'and even if you think them impressive, I only said those things because I couldn't deal with other people's emotions on top of my own. I'm so angry with him, Juu. I can't even put into words how angry I am. I'm furious. I know he didn't choose it,' as Juushirou opened his mouth to protest, "and that it wasn't as though he died just

to spite me and make my life so much more complicated, but I can't… process it any other way. No, maybe it's just that I'm afraid to. If I stop being angry at him, what else will I feel? I won't hold it together… and I must. More than you, more than anyone else… I must."

He closed his eyes, battling against his tears, and Juushirou let him hold his internal struggle, waiting for the dark eyes to meet his once again. When they did, they were full of shadows, and he sighed.

"Yes, but like I said before, you aren't in this alone. We will fight with you. I will fight with you. You shouldn't even doubt it — you don't have to shoulder the full weight of it alone. It's not good for you like this — you can't run on anger forever. It'll make you reckless, and… I don't want to see you like that."

"You'll fight with me?" Shunsui gazed at him hollowly, and Juushirou nodded.

"Of course, you idiot. What else would I do? What else have we always done?" he demanded. "You can give me orders that actually hold weight now, rather than just dragging me into your troublesome bright ideas."

"Your bright ideas are just as troublesome," Shunsui retorted laconically.

"Perhaps, but it doesn't make the fact any more true," Juushirou held his ground. "Sensei left you this burden because he knew I'd back you up. Even if nobody else does, I will. Even if you annoy Central Forty Six by trying to rewrite the rules of Vice Captaincy, and turn Zaraki Kenpachi into a walking slaughter machine, even so."

"You seem to know a lot of a Captain Commander's business, considering I haven't told you anything about it."

"Unohana-taichou mentioned it to me," Juushirou admitted. "I spoke to her on my way here. It's hard to know how she feels about it — but she'll do it, nonetheless. To avenge Sensei. To put things to rights. To rebuild his Soul Society… and take it forward… you've already taken the first steps. Even if you don't need me right now — I'm here when you do."

"And what if the next time, they take you from me too?" Now the emotion in Shunsui's voice was raw and almost plaintive, the expression in his dark eyes almost too much for Juushirou to bear. "We know what these people can do. We know they steal lives. Yama-jii is… not here now. What if something I do… means they take you

too?"

"Do you have so little faith in me and in this?" Juushirou patted Sougyo no Kotowari's hilt. "How many times have I told you that I don't need you to protect me? I can fight my own battles. I won't be killed. You needn't look like that, Shunsui. I won't be. I pro…"

"Don't promise what you can't be sure to keep!" Shunsui cut across him, clamping his hand forcibly across Juushirou's jaw to prevent him from completing the sentence. "I mean it, Juu, this is serious! You can have all the ideals and hopes and beliefs in the world, but they amount to nothing when dealing with an enemy like this. The man who guided us and taught us everything is dead. This world is new, alien, dark and empty. We are all potentially the fodder of the next battle. And you're wrong if you think I don't need to protect you. I do. From the moment I accepted it… from the moment I became Sou Taichou, everyone's lives became mine to protect. Your life is in my hands. Literally. My decisions… could cost people their lives."

Juushirou pushed his friend's arm away, stepping back from his touch.

"Shunsui…" he murmured, and Shunsui groaned, burying his head in his hands.

"Yama-jii dealt with things like that all the time, and somehow, he kept going and moving forwards in spite of it," he murmured. "I don't know if I can. Seeing the people around me killed, knowing that their blood is on my hands… it's beyond bearing."

He rubbed his brow fiercely.

"See, you shouldn't have come. This is the kind of thing I think of when I stop being angry and start thinking on other lines," he said bitterly. "I don't like losing people, Juu. I don't know how to process Yama-jii's death except to shut it out and keep going, keep doing what I think he'd expect me to do in this situation. But I can't… I can't lose you too. If that happened… I don't know what I would do."

Juushirou pressed his lips together.

"I won't promise not to die in the next battle," he said gravely. "I'm sorry, I spoke without thinking, and I know you're right. I will promise, though, that I will always support you. I won't leave you alone. We fight together, we protect Seireitei, we avenge our Sensei and we put things back to rights. If we die, doing that… then so be it. That's why we're here, and it's a cause worth dying for. I'm not going to go into the battle looking for death, though. This conversation may

have hurt you, but it's only hardened my resolve. I'll make sure you don't need to worry about my safety… so you can do your job, and I can do mine. We're not the same any more — for the first time in our lives, we rank differently. But Sensei was right, to choose you. There are hard decisions that sometimes need to be made, and you can make them. You'd do it better than me. We both know that."

"By hard decisions, you mean ruthless ones," Shunsui observed grimly. "I'm not as good a person as you, nor as principled. I don't believe in people in the way you do, nor do I trust them. I enter a battle expecting to commit atrocities, because that is how a soldier really fights. Those are the decisions you mean, aren't they? Being willing to make Zaraki into a monster, or drag Dai-senpai's memories out of hiding and force her back into a fighting role… even if it kills her? Or separating myself from my closest friend, because if I don't do that… I can't… do anything I need to do."

"It's all right," Juushirou reflected. "That friend is a stubborn man, and he doesn't take hints easily. He won't be offended by your silence… just so long as you know he's there, when you do need him. In this fight, and every other from this point on."

"I guess I don't need to hear you say it to know it's true," Shunsui admitted. "But at the moment I can't have anyone close to me. There's too much at stake and too much to be done. Thirteenth needs you, too, especially since Rukia-chan is hurt and who knows how long she'll be in *their* hands? I don't know what will happen about Eighth, but I will need to do something about it, because it's now part of my job to do something about it. I don't want to leave that place and my people there, but I have no choice and nor do they. That being the case…"

"You're keeping Nanao,"

"Yes, I am. I had to," Shunsui owned. "I didn't intend to, not at first, but… if I have to come here, and live with his silent ghost like this — his, and Sasakibe's, and the shadow of what lurks in that cell beneath my feet — then I need something I can trust in. Someone I know will do her job and not ask questions I don't want asked. Nanao is a good Vice Captain and I trust her. More, I can work with her. And Okikiba is a good officer, but…"

"A stranger, in a world of strangeness?"

"Something like that."

Shunsui let out a heavy sigh, then,

“I still have too much to do,” he admitted slowly. “I guess, it’s not time yet for me to deal with this in the proper way. Probably, I’ll get there. Right now, though, this is the only way I can handle everything that’s happened. I know I’m not the only one grieving, and that makes it harder. It’s not something I can hide away, it’s on every street corner and in the eyes of every shinigami that I meet. But I’ll push on regardless. It’s all I can do, and I expect you to do the same.”

He paused, and Juushirou saw a flicker of fresh resolve surface in the sad dark eyes.

“Ukitake, you’re dismissed,” he continued mildly. “If I need you, I’ll send a message, but for now you have your own issues to see to, and you’re surplus here.”

Juushirou did not respond at once. Then, at length, he nodded, offering his companion a slight smile as he lifted his hand in a salute.

“Yes, sir,” he said earnestly. “Orders understood.”